

#2. The Olive Tree (14/04/24)

Readings: Romans 11:17-24 (Romans 9:30-33, 10:1-4, 9-13)

1. Read Romans 9:30-33. It was clear that Paul felt that many thought that to receive God's salvation they needed to work for it; in some way to earn it.
 - a. In what (subtle) ways can we make it about what we do, rather than what Jesus has already done for us?
 - b. Our faith in Jesus, if real, should make a real difference to how we live our lives. How can the outward expression of this, become about works, rather than about faith?
 - c. What do you do to ensure that your relationship with God is about your faith in his Son, rather than your achievements or failures?
2. Read 10:1-4 and 9-13. Here Paul argues that salvation can't be achieved through the law, but only through faith in Jesus.
 - a. How do you understand 10:4?
 - b. How do you understand 10:9?
 - c. What are the perceived challenges today of speaking of the faith we have in Jesus (10:10)? What has been your own experience of doing so?
3. Keith said that 'God is inclusive' and that access to Him is not limited by ethnicity, gender, age, culture, etc.
 - a. How do you understand the inclusivity of God?
 - b. What are the 'limits' to God's inclusivity? (10:12b-13)
4. Read 11:22. In your routine prayers and thinking are you more likely to consider the kindness or sternness of God?
 - a. If there is an imbalance in your thinking about God, where does it originate, and what are the issues with being in relationship with only a God who is kind, or stern.
5. The olive tree is a very striking metaphor for our spiritual relationship with God. Imagining your own relationship with God as an olive tree (or a branch on the tree).
 - a. How healthy looking is your branch?
 - b. In what ways is it connected to the trunk and roots?
 - c. How is it routinely fed by the nourishing sap fed from the roots?
6. In Paul's time the established natural branches were the Jews. Today, after 2000+ years of Christianity we are the established branches, and even the trunk which feeds newly grafted branches nourishment from the tree roots.
 - a. How are we ensuring that others (newbies who may be appear different from us) can be readily grafted on?
 - b. How do we ensure that we who are established continue to receive from the roots of our faith so that we grow and don't become smug or complacent?
 - c. How do we ensure that newbies are able to grow and be nourished?
- 7.

#1. The Olive Tree – Introduction (07/04/24, Richard Saint)

Readings: Romans 9:6-16, 25-26

1. Before we embark on Part 2 of our tour of Romans, cast your mind back to April 2023 to Part One. We examined together topics like, Justification, Sanctification, Our Adoption, Our Humanity, New Family, Reality, Status, Comfort, and new life.
 - a. What, if anything, has stayed with you from that series? Has anything been particularly impactful to you?
2. Richard re-introduced Paul's overarching theme, and driving force, of the letter to the Romans – The Gospel, The Good News.
 - a. How would you describe or explain the Good News to someone?

3. Paul writes, (Rm 1:16), “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for **it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.**”
 - a. What do you think of Paul’s description?
You may want to split it into the three parts (highlighted above).

This week, we are particularly celebrating in the word, “everyone”. This understanding of who salvation was for, was a massive shift from what had previously been understood.

In this passage from Romans, Paul first introduces the idea of God’s narrowing, before opening the idea of God’s expansion plan.

4. God’s narrowing relates to the fact that being “God’s chosen people” was never an automatically inherited condition, it isn’t something hereditary. It was always about God’s choice. God chose Abraham, God chose Isaac, God chose Jacob. Not because they were deserving, or the best, brightest, strongest, or most numerous. Just simply God’s choice. What do you think of this?

One thing to remember is that it is not that God loved *only* his chosen people. It is not to do with love or hate (these words from the passage relate to contrasts rather than absolutes). We know God loves all his creation. It is to do with being set apart for a special purpose. God’s chosen people were set apart for a special purpose (not that they always achieved this). You may want to take some time to discuss this and think this through.

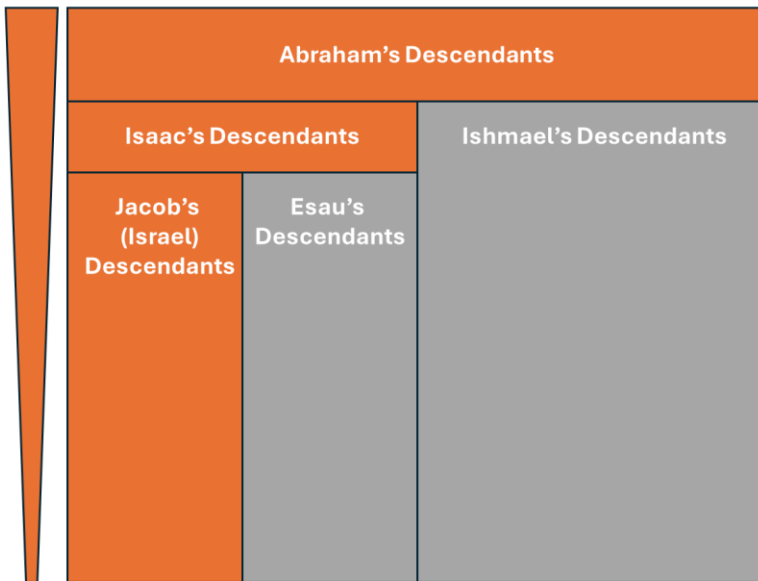
5. God’s expansion plan was visible (if not enacted) even at the time of Abraham. Paul writes (Gal 3:6-9), “Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith.” God was always going to include Gentiles in his salvation plan.
 - a. What do you think about the fact that God’s plan of salvation is now available to all?
 - b. Take some time to thank God and praise him for his choice and plan of inclusion, making his invitation to accept salvation available to all.

Richard finished by introducing the “Casual Conjunctive Adverbial” – words that link an action to the cause for that action (Consequently... As a result... Therefore... Accordingly...)

Richard’s point was that the choice to follow Jesus, to accept God’s plan of salvation includes a casual conjunctive adverbial, there is a consequence of that choice. These consequences are what we will be looking at over this series.

6. Take some time to think about, and share with each other, what you consider some of the consequence of following might be.
7. The choice to follow is not the end, it is only the beginning. What comes next is the call to discipleship. “What follows the choice is the decision to follow where God leads.”
 - a. What do you think of this statement describing discipleship?

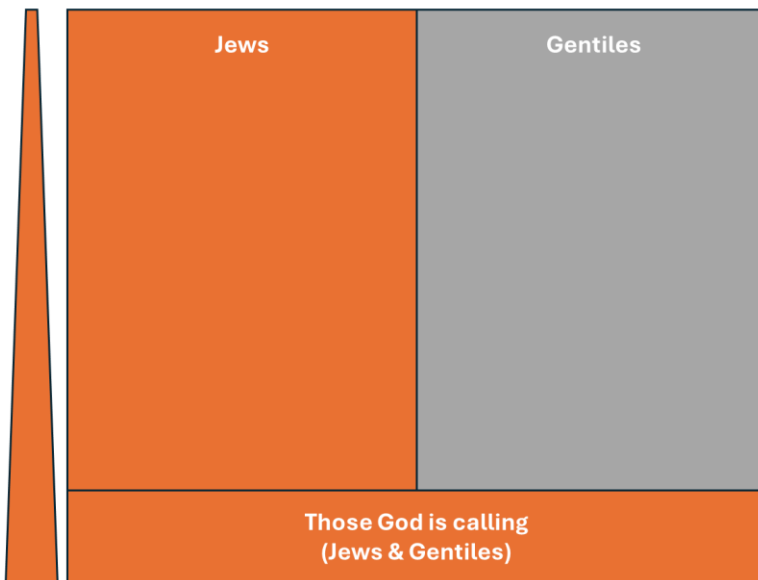
God's Narrowing



Rm 9:6-7

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham simply because they are his offspring, but “through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”

God's Expansion Plan



Rm 9:24-26

including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they shall be called children of the living God.”